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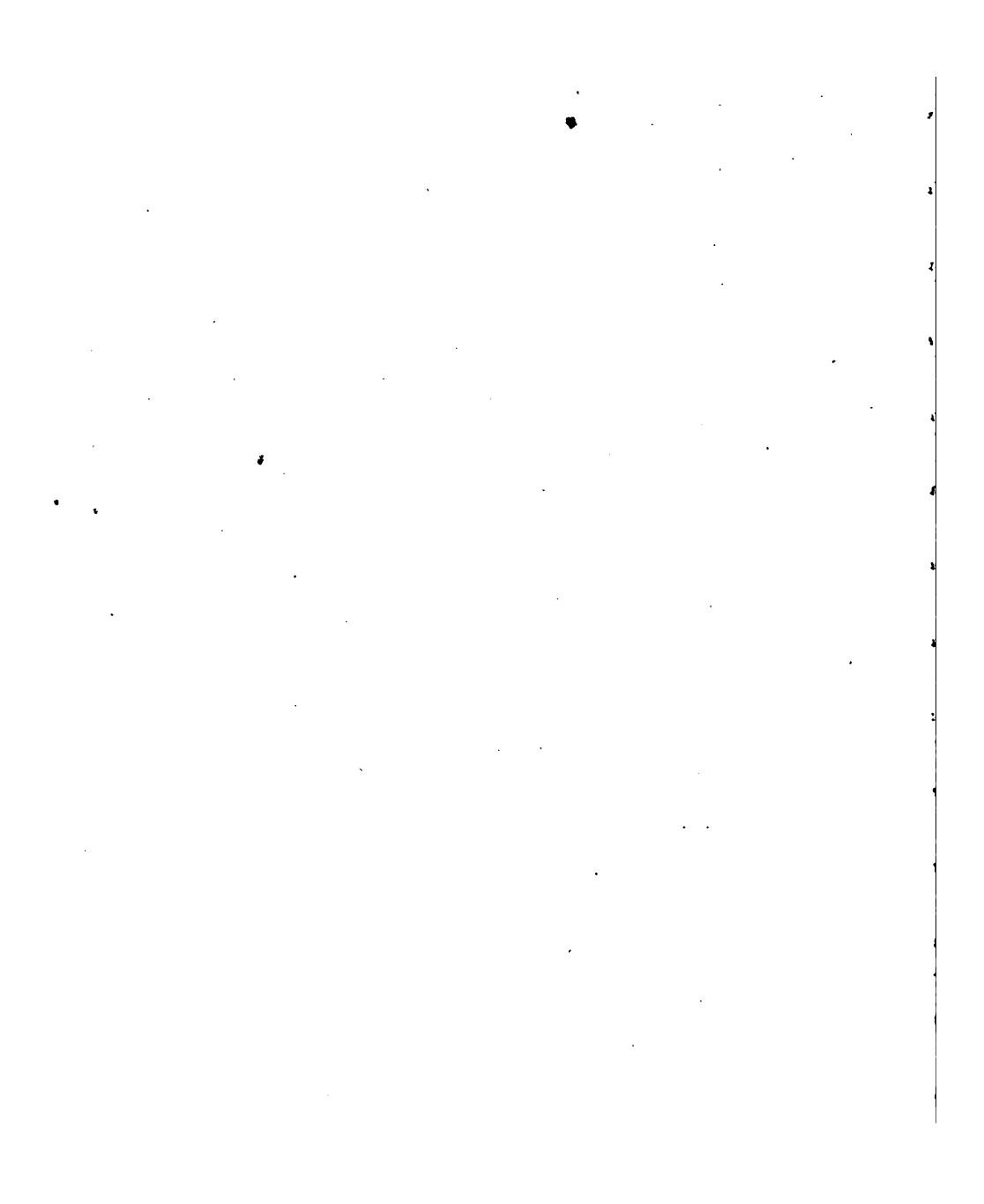
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The Translator

To





Sonnets from Venice

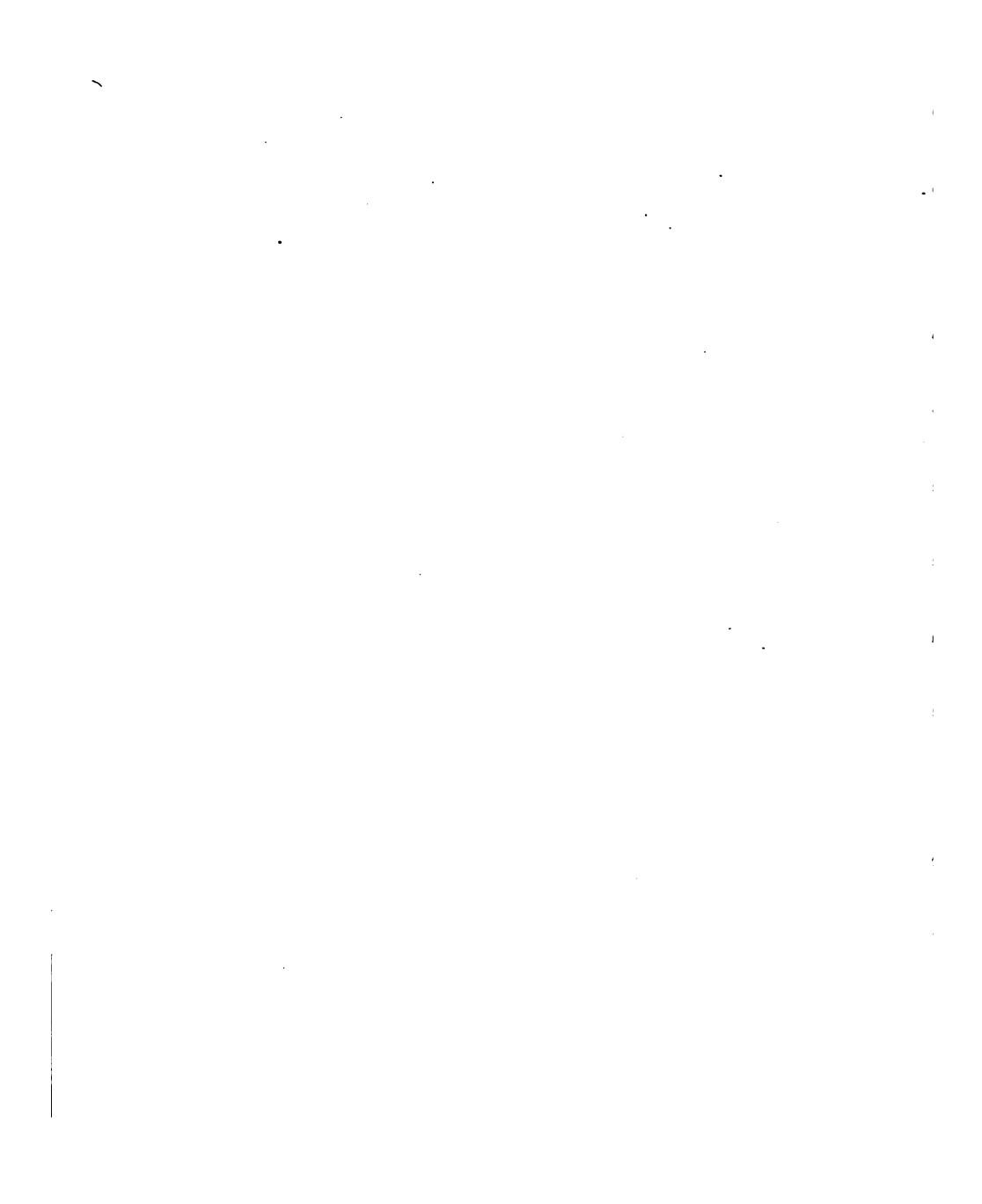
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From the translator



# **SONNETS FROM VENICE**

**TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN OF**

**PLATEN - *Hans Heine***

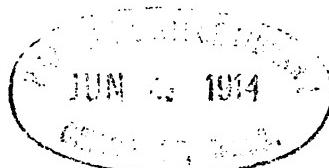
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**REGINALD B. COOKE**

**MADISON, WISCONSIN**

**1914**

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The Green Book

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## Foreword

It is customary to consider August Platen the greatest of Teutonic sonneteers, or to admit that his elder contemporary Rückert is in this form his only peer. In his *Geschichte des Sonettes in der deutschen Dichtung*, Welti declares that Platen brought the German sonnet to such perfection that he has been the model for all subsequent poets of his country who adopted this form. The characteristics of Platen as a sonneteer are those usually thought of in association with the Latin rather than the Teutonic mind, elegance, precision, and the highest quality of refinement both in language and thought. As a master of diction he has had few equals in any literature, while the objective and passionless nature of his thought led Goethe to remark that Platen had but one lack, namely love.

Of the one hundred and seven sonnets which appear in the complete editions of Platen's works, the seventeen constituting the *Sonette aus Venedig* not merely

form the longest series, but contain the best of Platen's work. Robertson calls them without qualification "the finest collection of sonnets in the German tongue." Of these sonnets the first fourteen (in the order as given here) were written during a two months' stay in Venice in 1824, being completed in November; and in his *Tagebuch* for the twenty-seventh of February of the year following Goethe records: "Venetian sonnets of Count Platen, found praiseworthy." They were first printed at Erlangen in the latter year. The last three sonnets were added at a somewhat later date.

It is believed that no English translation of these sonnets has hitherto appeared, with the exception of a rendering of the fifth by C. T. Brooks, to be found in Warner's *Library of the World's Best Literature*. This, it may be well to add, in view of a certain degree of similarity which the translation here given bears to it in regard to the choice of rhymes, was unknown to the present translator until his translations were completed.

In the structure of the translations the originals

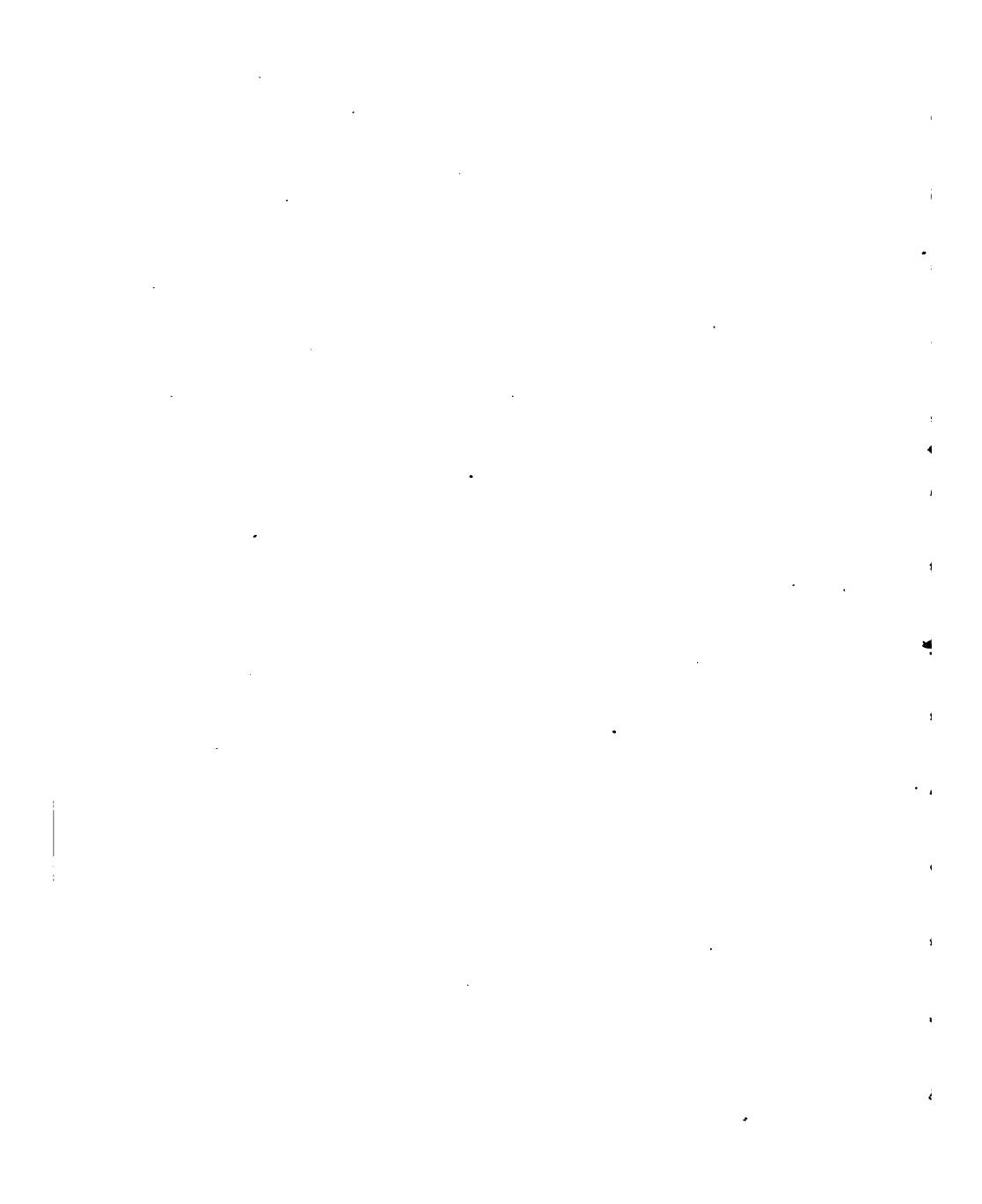
have been imitated as closely as possible. With a single exception the break at the conclusion of the octave, universal with Platen, has been preserved. The rhyme-scheme is throughout identical, though it would of course have been in vain to attempt to retain in our monosyllabic tongue the feminine rhymes which, with such wonderful effect, Platen employs almost exclusively. The attempt has been to make the translations relatively literal, and it is hoped that the secondary endeavor for values of expression has nowhere seriously interfered with faithfulness to the original. The objectivity and detailed character of Platen's work has not rendered the task in this respect an easier one. May the reader be in some measure led to a realization of Platen's own wish, as expressed in sending Goethe a copy of the poems, "to bring again the picture of that memorable city before your mind." Such a picture is assuredly afforded by the words of Platen, if not by their present rendering.

University of Wisconsin.

R. B. C.



To any German friend whom the stars lure  
To this foam-sprinkled City of the Isles  
Be this small volume a remembrancer,  
When he by the Laguna's banks beguiles  
—While he lies dreaming in his gondola—  
The happy hours, midst Love's and Beauty's smiles,  
And, putting it aside, may softly say  
A feeling heart before him open lay.



I.

AND now forsaking the high seas my eyes  
Turn where Palladio's fanes from out the tide  
Stand nobly forth, upon whose steps subside  
The waves which bear us with no false disguise.  
With thankful hearts we land, and backward flies,  
In fancy, the lagoon, and high and wide  
The Doges' colonnades, now dignified  
By age, lie 'fore us with the Bridge of Sighs.  
We see the Lion of Venice, this her pride  
In former days, with brazen pinions rise  
On his colossal column there bestride.  
I step ashore, not without dread surmise.  
There Saint Mark's Square gleams in the noon tide;  
In truth to tread it—were such daring wise?

## II.

THIS labyrinth of bridges and small streets,  
Self-intertwining in a thousand ways!  
How shall I ever thread this tangled maze,  
How solve so vast a puzzle? This defeats  
The fancy. From the terraced parapets  
Of Saint Mark's Tower may pierce the far-seeing gaze,  
And from the marvels which the eye surveys  
Evolves a clear-set picture. There one greets  
The azure sea, and here the Alps, whose walls,  
Wide-curved, look down where the lagoona laves  
The low-lying islands which her charm entrails.  
See! Of a valiant race there come the braves  
To build them temples and palatial halls  
On oaken pillars midst the ocean waves.

### III.

**H**OW pleasant, when the fires of day forbear,  
To look abroad, where ship and gondel dance,  
When the serene lagoon, in shimmering trance,  
Soft laves the shores of Venice. Turning where  
Sight feels recalled, to landward, towering there  
Palace and church seen to the 'wilder'd glance  
To mount to Heaven, and clamorous cries enhance  
The flood of life on the Rialto's stair.  
Here each way swarming, whom no cares molest,  
Of ever-genial drones a happy throng  
Heeds not the passer-by's untimely jest;  
And when the evening shadows fall along  
The Riva and Saint Mark's, then all request  
A tale, a chorus, or a twilight song.

IV.

**N**O longer now this madness overpowers,  
And no more must I wander far and wide.  
My soul has won at last a trusted guide,  
As not the least of Friendship's priceless dowers.  
And now to thee, O Friend, belong mine hours,  
Thou gav'st a goal to hopes unsatisfied,  
To which I haste, or whither 'tis descried  
The joys of meeting may perchance be ours.  
You beck to me from many a hallowed shrine,  
Thy gentle soul of Truth a worshiper,  
Thy spirit one harmonious design.  
Oh, were it possible year after year,  
To you my being wholly to resign,  
To live, Bellini, with thine angels there!

V.

VENICE still lies in dreamland, casting here  
Only the shadows of her olden day.  
The stern Republic's Lion, to man a prey,  
Has left his lonely prison waste and drear.  
The brazen steeds of war which tower there  
On yonder church, brought through the waves, even  
they,  
No more the same, alas! must now obey  
The reins of Corsica's great conqueror.  
Where tarry now the folk of kingly race,  
Who, where these ruins, now vanishing, lie prone,  
Dared build them many a marble dwelling-place?  
The grand ancestral character now, shown  
Upon the grandson's brow, we seldom trace,  
As hewn upon the Doges' graves—in stone.

## VI.

O TITIAN, thou man of mastery,  
At first I prized thee less than was thy right,  
But now behold we tremble 'fore thy might,  
Since I surveyed the *Assumption* wonderingly.  
As hovering clouds round thy Saint's feet I see,  
So was my cheerless soul shrouded in night;  
But now I see thee mount t'wards Heaven's light,  
Whither the Virgin strives so ardently.  
Great Pordenone stands close by thy side:  
Though neither would in life the victory share,  
In death to neither is his crown denied.  
As friends, a friendly hand wouldest thou might spare  
To Giorgone true, your country's pride,  
Or to that Paul to whom few may compare!

## VII.

IT SEEKS as if an ageless lamentation  
Bode in these breezes, which so lightly blow  
Hither from many a stately portico,  
Where once, enthroned, reigned Mirth and Jubilation.  
Even Venice fell, this time-defying nation.  
Backward the wheel of fortune ne'er may go,  
In the lone port few ships pass to and fro,  
Or on the lovely Riva keep their station.  
Like a proud woman with her finery,  
What arrogance, Venice, thou hast displayed,  
Just as Paul Veronese has painted thee!  
Now on the Giants' Stairway's balustrade  
Stands, mazed, a lover of Calliope,  
That this vain tribute of his tears be paid!

### VIII.

O VENICE, week by week thou dost instil  
A larger love, and scarce can I reclaim  
My heart from bondage: at the very name  
Of Mestre or Fusina strikes a chill  
Deep through my breast. Venice, I find thee still  
Without a peer, since more and more I came  
To know thee. Seeing the great, my soul, aflame,  
Sets greatness as the North Star of my will.  
Here what a plenitude of power and grace  
Dwells even in the marble, speechless, cold,  
Unyielding, and in many a thoughtful face  
Portrayed. And yet more firmly thus to hold  
Me fettered, mingling with this pictured race,  
The fairest blooms of living forms unfold.

## IX.

HERE as a tulip thrives the art of man,  
Sprung with its lustrous hues from out the sea,  
Here, like a magic mirage, gloriously  
Decking the heaven's many-colored span.  
How great art thou, exalted Titian,  
How soft Bellini, and what purity  
Piombo's. Oh, how earthly sorrows flee  
Before Paolo's *Saint Sebastian*.  
Whatever brush and color have made bold  
Here to achieve, the chisel many and fine  
And beauteous thought in marble likewise told.  
Whoe'er is drawn to San Giuliano's shrine,  
The *Sleep of the Redeemer* to behold,  
Must love Campagna as a man divine.

## X.

INTO the realms of life for evermore  
Yon artists lead me. Never can I spare  
Thy presence, nor to eternity foreswear  
The joy of striving 'ward thy higher law.  
Art only has the power to poise before  
God's very glory, Art alone so dare.  
Whose soul does homage to Perfection, ne'er  
For him hath Heaven further gifts in store.  
Who would not propagate Faith's mysteries  
To every age, the Gospel's beauty hymn  
Through every land, throughout all diocese,  
If Palma's saints with palms accompanied him,  
Paolo's Alexander, and, with these,  
Titian's Tobias with the seraphim?

## XI.

FLED to the desert from the human horde,  
Here stands the Baptist, that in purer spheres  
The lonely spirit be purged of earthly fears,  
High-souled, great-hearted servant of the Lord.  
With arm upraised he seems to point toward  
The Son of Mary, and with ardent tears  
The unchanging glory of his glance appears  
The healing balm of pity to afford.  
Who is there from this picture can depart  
Without the longing of a pious mirth  
To worship God enthroned in Titian's heart?  
O Golden Age, of long forgotten birth,  
When still the teacher of the world was Art,  
And only Beauty was adored on earth!

## XII.

HERE truly shalt thou see no verdant glades,  
Here shalt thou bathe no longer in the rare  
Fragrance of roses; yet what thou saw'st there  
By flower-girt shores here soon from memory fades.  
Now gently, star-lit, fall the dewy shades  
Of night, alluring all to Saint Mark's Square,  
And there the fairest of Venetia's fair  
Sit in long rows 'neath sumptuous arcades.  
Toward the Plaza's center every way,  
As Canaletto seeks to picture them,  
Surge eager throngs, the music dies away  
Softly, and meanwhile on their brazen stem  
Flags of three monarchies aloft display  
The glory of Venetia's ancient fame.

### XIII.

SINCE there where Beauty reigns Love too doth hold  
Her empire, let none therefore show surprise,  
If this, that all my spirit prostrate lies  
Before thy love, should scarce remain untold.  
With me this passion never shall grow old,  
For here but narrowly it ramifies.  
Always within my breast are surging sighs  
For but one spring, which might but half unfold.  
Even though thy kindly heart would share with me  
Sweet thoughts, how shall a stranger yet requite  
The favors of thy hospitality?  
Thou hast no power nearer to invite  
My love, and on Saint Mark's Square you may see  
My lonely steps pass to and fro each night.

## XIV.

WHENE'ER deep sorrows on my spirit weigh,  
I may disport round the Rialto's stalls.  
To warrant that no vanity entrals  
The mind, I seek the calm which ends the day.  
Then oft I glance at the compact array  
Of bridges, at the barren wave which falls  
So soft, or where above the crumbling walls  
With bending branches clusters the wild bay.  
And when I stand on these enmarbled piers  
And lose my gaze abroad on the dark sea,  
Whose sight henceforth no Doges' heart endears,  
From time to time, in this mute revery,  
From far away canals the Gondoliers'  
Resounding cry scarcely disquiets me.\*

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\* The Gondoliers in Venice, whenever they come round the corner, give a cry of approach, to prevent the collision of two gondolas (Platen).

## XV.

ON ITS broad back the Canalazzo draws  
The gondel with the foreign visitor,  
Whom, Pesaro and thou Grimani, 'fore  
Thy palaces, their grace and splendor cause  
So great delight. And yet, by rude applause  
Unshamed, the earlier masterworks e'en more  
—Pisani, Vendramini, and Ca'd'Or'—  
In grandeur each the reverent spirit awes.  
Upward the Gothic arches spring, bestowing  
Rich tracery round balconies, and dighted  
With fair rosettes on scapes of marble growing.  
Oh what abundant harmony is plighted  
Where, in this very moment's life o'erflowing,  
Sincerity and Beauty reign united!

## XVI.

THOU art dear to me as one of those forms shown  
By Venice in her pictures. How the heart  
Is captive to them! and yet we depart,  
And straightway every one of them is flown  
From memory. Like the well-chiselled stone  
Which rises without pedestal thou art,  
Which even to Pygmalion might impart  
Content; and therefore grant me still thine own.  
From earliest youth hath Venice set her seal  
On thee: thou tarriest still in Heaven's sight  
By all Bellini's angels kept. I feel  
—Alas! that I must feel—that all this bright  
And glorious world deceives me, as I steal  
Away, like phantom visions of the night.

## XVII.

WHAT at the last is life's true recompense?  
What shall abide of all that here enthrals  
The fancy? Golden fortune, which befalls  
As hoped? Nay, only sorrow hastens not hence.  
The last swift hours pass before me whence  
All vanishes. Yet one last glance recalls  
Venetia's sea, Venetia's marble halls,  
Before the longing and astounded sense.  
As if still dwelling in a steadfast trance,  
With keenest aspiration, the eyes rove  
O'er what no longer shall before them dance.  
Then, the last duty, dreaded far above  
All else, there falls upon that countenance,  
For the last time in life, a look of love.

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